

**Q: One of my colleagues asks the children to hug her when they arrive in the morning. Is this an acceptable practice, according to our Code and Standards? What is the College's policy on RECEs hugging children?**

**R:** While the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* doesn't specifically mention hugging, several standards will help you to reflect on whether giving a child a hug is an appropriate action.

Developing quality relationships is a daily focus for RECEs working directly with children and families. Standard I: E states: "ECEs establish professional and caring relationships with children and families...ECEs are receptive listeners and offer encouragement and support by responding appropriately to the ideas, concerns and needs of children and families." Offering a hug may be an appropriate way to comfort, show support to and encourage children.

RECEs make ongoing decisions concerning children's need for support and assistance (Standard II: B.1). There are many scenarios where an RECE may observe that a child who is upset, angry or otherwise dysregulated may benefit from hugging a trusted adult. In these scenarios, an RECE may decide to ask a child if they want a hug.

According to Standard II, RECEs must recognize that children are unique. Educators adapt the learning environment and their own behaviours to respond to the needs of all children while respecting their differences.


The colleague who is asking children for hugs should reflect on whether all of the children are comfortable with the request. There are many reasons why a child may not need or want a hug on any given day, including their temperament, mood or attachment to an RECE. The best interests of the child should always be considered above the RECE's own interests.

Remember also that RECEs are in positions of power and trust over children under their professional supervision. Care must be taken to ensure that children are protected from abuse of such power (Standard V: A). Children see educators as authority figures. Therefore RECEs in this scenario should consider whether a child might be afraid to say no to them, even though a request for a hug may make them uncomfortable.

It is also important to consider the policies in place within your practice setting. RECEs must know, understand and abide by the legislation, policies and procedures relevant to their professional practice (Standard IV: A.2). If you aren't sure whether your workplace has a policy regarding touch, ask your employer for more information. ■



Practice Matters features questions regarding the College and the early childhood education profession. The College's Director of Professional Practice, Melanie Dixon RECE, and the Professional Practice team address issues that members face and apply the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* to various situations.

 Do you have a Professional Practice question? E-mail [practice@college-ece.ca](mailto:practice@college-ece.ca) for more information.

**Put it into Practice:** Reflect on how this scenario might be seen differently in infant, pre-school or school-aged settings.

Consult the College's Practice Guideline: **Supporting Positive Interactions with Children**. Reflect on the importance of building responsive relationships and supporting self-regulation in children.